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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7010
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Palestinians,
Syria/Sudan, Syria/Russian/Sweden, Lebanon, CIA Nomination,
Ahmadinezhad's Letter to Bush (5/10)

1. Summary: Syrian papers reported that Syria has received 53 families of Palestinian refugees who were trapped at the Jordanian and Iraqi borders for 6 weeks before. "Syria has taken necessary steps to host the Palestinian refugees in cooperation with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Higher Commission of Palestinian Refugees," Ali Mustafa, Director of the General Commission of Palestinian Refugees in Syria, said. Headlines featured a statement by Khaled Mashal, Head of the Hamas Political Bureau, praising the Syrian gesture.

Papers also reported that President Asad has received a letter from Sudanese President Umar Ahmad Hasan al-Bashir on relations between the two sisterly countries. The letter was delivered by Dr Mustafa Othman Isma'il, adviser to the Sudanese president, at a meeting attended by Vice President Faruq al-Shar'a and the Sudanese Ambassador in Damascus, Abd-al-Rahman Dirar. Talks dealt with the situation in the region and developments in the Darfur issue.

Papers reported that Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Makdad met in New York with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, who said that his country's position is that Syria has implemented all its obligations under UNSC resolution 1559. Makdad also met with Sweden's FM Jan Eliasson, the current chairman of the UNSC; they discussed the necessity of supporting the Palestinian people and solving the crisis of their living conditions.

Syrian newspapers discussed the resignation of CIA Director Porter Goss and the nomination of Michael Hayden to replace him. Dr Sa'id Musallam said in Al-Thawra that Michael Hayden's nomination shows that the US Administration intends to continue its plans to impose "hegemony" on the world and "suppress" domestic opposition. Dina Dakhallallah said in Al-Ba'th that the nomination of Michael Hayden as the new CIA director shows that President Bush is not planning to change his ways. The writer advises the US president to listen to the demonstrators in his country who have called for withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and turning of attention to domestic problems.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"In accordance with President Asad's directives, Syria receives the Palestinian families who were trapped at the Iraqi and Jordanian borders" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/10)

"President Asad receives a letter from his Sudanese counterpart, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, and discusses with Mustafa Othman Ismail, Advisor to the Sudanese President, the latest developments in the region and the Darfur Issue" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/10)

"Deputy Foreign Minister Miqdad receives Swedish Foreign Minister in New York and discusses bilateral relations and regional issues with Russian Foreign Minister. Lavrov: Syria has implemented resolution 1559" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/10)

"General Manager of the Commercial Bank of Syria Dergham confirms that US accusations against Syria are unfounded: We seek better banking performance despite pressure" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/10)

"Popularity of British Labor Party decreases by 6 points. British Minister of Treasury Brown: Prime Minister Blair will start negotiation to relinquish power. President Bush's popularity hits lowest record and retreats to 31 percent" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/10)

"Israel will finalize construction of the racist wall before the end of the year. Occupation forces continue shelling Gaza and tighten economic siege on Palestinians" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/10)

"British academics prepare to boycott Israeli universities" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/10)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Where Is Leadership?"

Salim Abbud, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (5/10): "When UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen exceeded his powers and called for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon and the demarcation of the border between them he was carrying out American-French instructions to that effect....

"The Lebanese parties that have always been against Syria and the Arab identity of Lebanon are the parties that are now calling for diplomatic relations between the two countries. The aim is to belittle the fraternal relations that are embodied by the brotherhood treaty between the two countries.... The resolution that they want to obtain from the UN Security Council, which calls for the establishment of diplomatic relations and the exchange of ambassadors, will be a prelude to other Security Council resolutions forcing Arab countries, including Lebanon and Iraq, to establish relations with Israel....

"Responding to an American-Israeli desire, some Lebanese parties are trying to divert the attention of the Lebanese people from the Arab-Israeli conflict; the American-Zionist plan for the region; the issue of Iraq; the American threats to Iran, Syria, Hizbollah, and the Palestinians; and the political, security, and economic issues that concern the Lebanese, by creating an imaginary conflict between Lebanon and Syria, or, in other words, a Lebanese-Syrian crisis."

"Policy of Disorder, For How Long?"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/10): "US policy shows blind bias toward Israel and reflects aggressive Israeli interests, not real American interests...."

"Washington prevents the condemnation of Israel in the United Nations and imposes collective punishment on the Palestinians for their democratic choice."

"In Lebanon, the US Ambassador gives instructions, concocts plots here and there, and works to deepen the rift in Lebanon's relations with Syria and the other Arab countries and to incite the Lebanese themselves against their national resistance and president.... The aim is to bring Israeli hegemony back to Lebanon...."

"The US Administration is also working to prolong the occupation of Iraq and turn the country into a military base threatening the peoples of the region and looting the resources of Iraq.... All this is done for the sake of Israel...."

"Is it not strange for a superpower to be driven by the designs of a terrorist entity that is hostile to international law and the UN Charter, an entity that has brought nothing upon the US Administration but the hatred of nations?"

"A Letter That Is an Enormous Step"

Hamid Huran, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, commented (5/10): "Iranian President Ahmadinezhad's letter to President Bush, in which he reportedly called for dialogue to solve the problems of the world, is an important step in the right direction...."

"Those who want stability in the world should pursue diplomacy and direct negotiations, not use other parties for negotiations or issue dictates and threats that only make crises worse.... Through the letter, Iran showed its definite desire to resolve its differences with the Europeans and Americans through diplomacy.... Iran takes a comprehensive vision toward world events, while the US policy is responsible for tension in the world."

"Bush's Changes Have Reached the CIA"

Dina Dakhilallah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (5/10): "After the scandals of the secret prisons in Europe, the series of leaks and bribes, the failures of 11 September, and erroneous war-related intelligence, the CIA, which won the Cold War against communism, today appears unable to stop its failures and even to find the right man to lead the necessary internal reforms...."

"Although Goss' resignation triggered a big controversy, the nomination of General Michael Hayden, Deputy Director of National Security, as his successor will trigger a bigger controversy, especially in the Congress, where Hayden will be asked about the secret eavesdropping program in which the National Security Agency participated while he was its chairman...."

"Hayden's nomination offers yet further proof that the changes Bush is making seek to entrench his administration's old approach, not launch a new one...."

"It appears that the US president, who sought changes under pressure from his party, which, like the president, is suffering a decline in its popularity, forgot that keeping Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney and appointing Hayden and others will not

improve the electoral position of the Republican Party.

"If Bush really wants to maintain the Republicans' control of Congress and the White House, he should perhaps listen carefully to the American people, who raised their voices in demonstrations in many American cities last week, demanding withdrawal from Iraq and attention to domestic issues such as health insurance, education, job opportunities, and fuel prices.

"Will Hayden manage to rearrange the CIA house? Or is this unimportant as long as he works under National Intelligence Director John Negroponte, who enjoys the president's acceptance and strong support?"

"Why Hayden as CIA Director?"

Sa'id Musallam, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/10): "Hayden's nomination as CIA chief is expected to draw strong opposition, first because he is a military officer and second because of his role in the eavesdropping scandal....

"There are two reasons behind President Bush's insistence on nominating Hayden as CIA director despite the opposition and concerns:

"The first is his willingness to continue the eavesdropping

program and to scrutinize the information that comes from intelligence sources while the US Administration is busy with foreign crises that have been exacerbated by false and misleading information.

"The second is the determination by Bush and his team to find further excuses and pretexts, through the analysis of secret information that Hayden is skilled at controlling, using, and fabricating, to continue the plan of hegemony and foreign intervention, and even to suppress attempts by some local quarters to make new revelations that help increase the American scandals."

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